

Census in Schools: Building Constituent Support and Statistical Literacy from the Ground Up

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Abstract: The Census in School (CIS) program facilitates the use of Census Bureau information in the classroom as part of the education and awareness campaign for the 2010 Census. The Census Bureau has used the CIS concept for several decades. However, the Census 2000 program was by far the most extensive with lesson plans for K-12, colorful wall maps, an Internet presence, a designated Census in Schools week, and even a theme song. We intend to build on the successes and lessons learned from the 2000 Census while realizing that our student audience is more sophisticated and our school systems and teachers feel more pressure than ever to stick to the scripted curriculum for a successful No Child Left Behind program and other state directives. Additionally, we want these audiences to seek the Census Bureau as their source of information on programs that reach beyond Census 2010, making Census in Schools an 'evergreen' program throughout the decade.

Questions:

1. What are the most effective and appropriate ways to communicate to teachers about the importance of the Census 2010? To students?
2. The CIS program's overall goal is to increase response rates. Given this goal, how do we measure return on investment (ROI) and evaluate the effectiveness of the Census in Schools program?
3. If we were to target our efforts at particular age or grade levels to achieve the highest ROI and effectiveness, what can we learn from marketing research that could help us better focus on and reach target audiences?
4. What marketing techniques and partnerships would best help us increase the effectiveness of this decennial program and the larger objective of increasing statistical literacy?

Disclaimer: The views expressed on (statistical, methodological, technical, or operations) issues are those of the author and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

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Recent History

The Census in Schools (CIS) concept has been in the Census Bureau for several decades. In 1980, we contracted to have curriculum materials produced for K-12. We worked with the Population Reference Bureau to produce an insert into their Population Bulletin for distribution to teachers. In 1990, two staff headed up the Census Bureau's Education Program that lasted through the mid-1990s and included teacher-based primers, maps, and education kits.

Through the decades, the need to help teachers and students understand the decennial census as an historic event has guided the program. Another guiding factor is interpreting the role the decennial census plays in the apportionment of Congressional seats as mandated in the U.S. Constitution. And finally the program is guided by the need to inform teachers and students about the decennial census as a resource for data about our nation's statistical portrait. These data fit with the curriculum being taught every day in the classroom, from social studies and math to geography and civics.

Throughout the program's iterations, the common belief was children would openly share information that they believed no one else had heard about, especially a parent or guardian. Their sharing of this information among their families and friends would result in increased participation and response rates to the decennial census. And, as these children became adults and parents themselves they also would value their earlier knowledge and participation in censuses and surveys.

The Census 2000 Census in Schools¹ program changed in several ways:

- It was part of a larger decennial outreach program.
- We invested in a Census in Schools office to manage the program.
- Through a partnership with "Scholastic," we created fun and relevant teaching materials that promoted the use of the Census Bureau as an information resource and that met the curriculum objectives of educators.
- We provided K-12 teaching tools for educators that included lesson plans to correlate with national standards in math, geography, civics and government, history, economics, and language arts.
- We distributed these materials via publications, a toll-free request line, the Internet, and at conferences and workshops.
- We provided professional development to in-service and pre-service teachers.
- Census in Schools staff directed educators to other resources helpful in achieving their curriculum needs
- We maintained relationships with educational organizations.
- We invested in map graphics to enable participating classrooms to have a prominent display as a part of the curriculum package.
- We extended the program to assist with the hard-to-enumerate areas, developing

¹ <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/teachers.html>

materials for special populations, including Head Start classes, English as a Second language, etc.

- We included Census in Schools in the formal Census 2000 evaluation program.

Key statistics show that we created 32 different products and printed 2.7 million K-12 curriculum kits of which 74 percent were distributed. Additionally, we distributed kits to principals (113,000), Adult ESL/Literacy (200,000), and Head Start (35,000). Approximately 45 million student take-home materials were distributed.

The evaluation, conducted in 2002, cited the following:²

- Around \$17.2 million was spent on the Census in Schools Program.
- Targeted audiences received materials:
 - All elementary school teachers and all secondary math or social studies teachers in hard-to-enumerate areas were sent an invitational packet.
 - Principals, other than those in hard-to-enumerate areas, administrators, and curriculum coordinators also received an invitational packet.
 - All elementary school teachers and middle school social studies teachers were sent Take-Home materials for students to learn about the decennial census and share with their parents at home -- thereby, having the potential to reach each K-8 grade student in other areas.
- Recommendations included:
 - Test alternative designs for the mailing envelopes.
 - Test alternative designs for (teaching) materials.
 - Use principals to transmit materials to teachers.
 - Conduct focus groups with teachers from hard-to-enumerate areas and form other areas to better understand how these teachers can be reached.

Activities following the Census 2000 Census in Schools program have remained rather static. As teachers requested the materials, we would send them materials designed for the Census 2000 packages and add their names to the program's mailing list (now >170,000). We also have maintained communications with the international statistical community to keep abreast of other national statistical organizations' efforts to help teachers and students develop statistical literacy and to create opportunities for students to become conduits for important census messages. Some countries use a Census *in* Schools theme while others use a Census@Schools theme with an emphasis on conducting classroom surveys where summary statistics and related projects are available to students.

Preparing for the 2010 Census

Recently, we have started to renew our program by:

- Creating new materials on the web, including State Facts for Kids to focus on interesting facts about their state.³
- Creating and testing new dynamic online pages, including coloring pages,

² <http://www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/D.2.pdf>

³ <http://www.census.gov/schools/facts/>

- games, and activities.
- Designing new teaching materials for older students.
- Designing new map products for classroom use and distribution.
- Extending our reach by conducting workshops at national educational conferences.
- Developing an automated system to monitor our communications and activities and to update our ad hoc requests from teachers to keep them abreast of current CIS activities, resources, and opportunities.
- Creating a monthly electronic newsletter for teachers and education leaders to inform them about the latest news from the Census Bureau.
- Presenting the goals of CIS program to DRAFTFCB, the 2010 communications contractor, to better coordinate and integrate activities and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the communications program.

Beyond the challenges we face in communicating the Census 2010 message, we realize that there are external forces to be considered:

- Our student audience is more sophisticated than in 2000.
- Students' online presence and behaviors indicate that the Internet is an important vehicle for capturing their interests and time.
- School systems and teachers are more pressured than ever to stick to the scripted curricula to succeed with the *No Child Left Behind* program and other state directives.
- We want teachers and students to seek the Census Bureau as their resource for information on programs that reach beyond Census 2010, making our Census in Schools a living and 'evergreen' program.

Summary

Clearly, the Census in Schools program faces huge short term and long term challenges.

1. What are the most effective and appropriate ways to communicate to teachers about the importance of the Census 2010? To students?
2. The CIS program's overall goal is to increase response rates. Given this goal, how do we measure return on investment (ROI) and evaluate the effectiveness of the Census in Schools program?
3. If we were to target our efforts at particular age or grade levels to achieve the highest ROI and effectiveness, what can we learn from marketing research that could help us better focus on and reach target audiences?
4. What marketing strategies would best help us increase the effectiveness of this decennial program and the larger objective of increasing statistical literacy?

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